

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03
CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 MCE-00 ACDA-12 AID-05
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P R 231300Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7392
INFO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 1147

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS EC
SUBJ: PRESIDENT POVEDA FOREIGN MINISTER, DEFENSE MINISTER
DISCUSS ARMS ACQUISITIONS

REF: (A) QUITO 1082; (B) STATE 41780

1. IN FEBRUARY 22 MEETING PRESIDENT POVEDA, FOREIGN MINISTER JOSE AYALA LASSO, AND DEFENSE MINISTER ANDRES ARRATA HELD WITH CHARGE AND POLCOUNS PRINCIPALLY TO DISCUSS PERU SITUATION (SEPTTEL), ECUADOR'S ARMS ACQUISITION POLICY WAS ALSO TOUCHED ON.

2. PRESIDENT POVEDA BEGAN BY ASKING MINDEFENSE WHETHER HE HAD YET PASSED TO EMBASSY GOE'S SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS REGARDING VULCAN/CHAPARRAL SYSTEM. MINDEFENSE SAID HE HAD NOT RECEIVED ALL THE DATA FROM THE AIR FORCE BUT WAS WORKING ON IT. POVEDA STATED THAT TWO V/C BATTALIONS WOULD BE MINIMUM AND THREE WOULD BE IDEAL. HE REITERATED HIS HOPE (REF A) THAT SYSTEMS COULD BE OBTAINED AT FAVORABLE PRICE AND DELIVERY SCHEDULE, AND URGED CHARGE TO LOOK INTO IT WHEN HE
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WENT TO WASHINGTON, AS WELL AS THE POSSIBILITY OF A GOE COMMISSION VISITING WASHINGTON TO DEAL WITH PURCHASE OF VULCAN/CHAPPARAL.

3. CHARGE SAID THAT DESPITE THE USG'S UNIVERSAL ARMS TRANSFER POLICY, US WAS CONSIDERING OFFERING THE V/C TO ECUADOR BECAUSE OF ITS ESSENTIALLY DEFENSIVE

CHARACTER. HOWEVER, THERE ARE MANY IN WASHINGTON WHO ARE INTERESTED IN ECUADOR'S FUTURE PURCHASING PLANS, ESPECIALLY IF IT HAS INTENTION OF ACQUIRING WEAPONS OF AN OFFENSIVE CHARACTER.

4. LOOKING A BIT NON-PLUSSED BY THE QUESTION, POVEDA ANSWERED THAT ECUADOR HAD ABSOLUTELY NO PLANS TO TAKE THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST PERU. FOR THAT REASON ITS ARMS ACQUISITION WERE STRICTLY FOR DEFENSIVE PURPOSES. HE EMPHASIZED THAT ECUADOR WAS SEEKING A MINIMUM, CREDIBLE DEFENSE AND WOULD BUY THE "MINIMUM OF THE MINIMUM" TO ACHIEVE THAT END.

5. DEFENSE MINISTER ARRATA NOTED THAT CERTAIN WEAPONS SYSTEMS CAN BE USED FOR EITHER OFFENSIVE OR DEFENSIVE PURPOSES. HE INDICATED THAT WHILE THE KFIR HAD THAT CHARACTERISTIC ECUADOR HAD WISHED TO EMPLOY IT AS AN "ARMS DISUASIVA", NOT TO LAUNCH A RAID AGAINST LIMA. (ECUADOREAN MILITARY EMPLOYS PHRASE "ARMA DISUASIVA" FUZZILY, USING IT TO DESCRIBE BOTH A "PORCUPINE" DEFENSIVE SYSTEM AS WELL AS A SECOND-STRIKE DETERRENT.)

6. COMMENT: UNFORTUNATELY, THE CONVERSATION PROCEEDED TO OTHER SUBJECTS AND THEN CAME TO AN END BEFORE WE COULD ELICIT A CLEAR-CUT PROMISE THAT ECUADOR DOES NOT INTEND TO BUY OFFENSIVE WEAPONS. THE PRESIDENT WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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EMPHATIC IN HIS DECLARATION THAT NO ARMS WOULD BE USED FOR OFFENSIVE PURPOSES. THE INTELLIGENCE AVAILABLE TO US IS THAT THE ONLY QUESTIONABLY OFFENSIVE WEAPONS THAT ECUADOR HAS ANY PLANS TO BUY--AND THESE ARE RATHER NEBULOUS PLANS--ARE ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS. IN VIEW OF PERU'S OVERWHELMING ARMORED SUPERIORITY, WE DOUBT WHETHER PERU COULD MAKE MUCH OF THAT.
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